

It's Time to Write Your Lesson Plan— *Choose Your Own Future: Fascism Series #8*¹

Jenna N. Hanchey

1. It's time to write your lesson plan. You've been putting it off because this is the week on race and racialization, and even though it's not technically "critical race theory" you know how the students will interpret it. Some of the students, all of the students, you can't quite tell anymore. It doesn't quite matter anymore, what with the AI-controlled emotional monitors installed by the University on the requisite smart watches provided to all students for free their freshmen year (all hail President Bob).

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¹ This story plays on the format of the popular "Choose Your Own Adventure" series of young adult novels, where the reader is required to make choices that lead them to different scenarios and conclusions. It is also heavily indebted to two speculative fiction pieces: C. J. Lavigne, "Choose Your Own," *Daily Science Fiction*, April 22, 2022, <https://dailysciencefiction.com/science-fiction/virtual-reality/c-j-lavigne/choose-your-own>; Effie Seiberg, "A Guided Meditation for Pandemic Anxiety (As Approved by Our Lord Xanthalu)," *Daily Science Fiction*, October 5, 2021, <https://dailysciencefiction.com/hither-and-yon/sf-fantasy/effie-seiberg/a-guided-meditation-for-pandemic-anxiety-as-approved-by-our-lord-xanthalu>. Theoretically, the piece draws from the Frankfurt School writing that ties politics to mass feeling and aestheticization: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction* (1935); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 94-136.

The emotional monitors can't be fooled. You need to write a lesson plan that keeps the students calm and content, regardless of what they're learning.

If you choose to:

- (a) Avoid explicitly naming BIPOC groups, or indeed using the term BIPOC, then go to 3
- (b) Avoid talking about whiteness or white people, then go to 5

2. "All right, all right, everyone calm down. Let's do one of the University-approved meditation exercises, ethically sourced from researchers who climbed Mt. Everest, to bring back our focus (all hail President Bob), and then we can talk about how this really isn't anyone's fault: it's a long-standing problem of racism that none of us really have a hand in."

Oh no, the students aren't engaging in the meditation. It doesn't seem to be working.

If you choose to:

- (a) Frantically cold-call on a student who usually seems to "get it," even when you're not explicitly talking about "it" if "it" is anything controversial at all, then go to 6
- (b) Try to maintain your composure and continue the meditation anyway, then go to 7

3. You begin your lesson, carefully avoiding making any mention of marginalized racial groups, especially Blackness, Indigeneity, the sordid history of how the University came to own the land you're currently standing on and how it continues acquiring more (all hail President Bob), and, of course, Muslims. You're talking about citizenship and just starting to relax, stand up straighter, and even stop sweating when you see a furrow crease a man's brow.

He raises his hand and you reluctantly call on him, because you've learned from experience how their feelings can spike when you don't. "This is *my* country, and

anyone who doesn't like it can go back to where they came from," he states, pounding a fist on his desk.

If you choose to:

- (a) Focus your response on his feelings in order to avoid the colonial structures that enable him to think of this as his country, then go to 4
- (b) Focus your response to the colonial structures in order to defuse the student's intense personal feelings, then go to 2
- (c) Allow another student who's raising her hand so hard her arm is about to pop out of its socket to answer instead, knowing that you'll set off her emotional monitor too if you don't, then go to 6

4. You ask, pasting the most genuine-looking expression of concern on your face that you can, "And how does that make you feel?" At first it seems to work as a means of purging the potential emotional overload, but after a while the student soon starts to get heated.

If you choose to:

- (a) Try to diffuse the tension by asking another student how *she* feels, then go to 6
- (b) Put on an interested face, and wait to see where this is going, then go to 7

5. You begin your lesson, carefully avoiding making any mention of whiteness, white people, white feminism, white fragility, and, of course, pumpkin spice lattes. Most of your students are white, and of the savior persuasion that feels good supporting the University initiative to provide scholarships to Students of Color as long as they agree to have their picture taken with Influencing majors once a month (all hail President Bob). You're getting into a rhythm of talking about racism without racists in a way that is oblique enough to slide past the conservatives and not quite offensive enough to set off the anger of your militant radicals when you see a stylish woman cross her arms.

She raises her eyebrows and you ask if she has anything to say, because you know her emotional monitor will plummet if you don't pander to her whims. "Well, professor," she starts slowly, pausing to check her nails, "I work really hard to be here. Shouldn't they all just stop being so lazy?"

If you choose to:

- (a) Focus your response on her feelings in order to avoid mention of the racist structures that enabled her to get where she is, then go to 4
- (b) Focus your response the racist structures that affect her without her realizing it in order to avoid the implication that she actually doesn't work that hard, then go to 2
- (c) Allow another student whose hand leapt into the air as soon as she implied BIPOC are lazy to answer instead, knowing that you'll set off her emotional monitor too if you don't, then go to 6

6. You gesture to the student. She stands up. "Professor, this is bullshit and you know it. Why are you tip-toeing around all the violence that's happening, even on our own campus?"

"All hail President Bob," you can't help but mutter under your breath.

If you choose to:

- (a) Focus on how you've been raised in racist structures, to remove your own responsibility for how you whitewashed your lesson plan, then go to 2
- (b) Focus on her angry feelings, to avoid implication in the structural racism of your lesson plan, then go to 4

7. Oh no, you hear it. One or more of the students' emotional monitors go off. You've done it now! How could you mess up a simple lesson plan? You glance at the classroom door, but before you can even consider running, you are promptly injected with a sedative by one of the state-of-the-art Campus Safety Drones that

your university designed and patented after winning the \$3 million grant from the US Department of Defense (all hail President Bob).

You fall to the floor in a heap where you will remain until Campus Police come to collect you.

- (a) Your only option is to plan better for your next period and go back to 1

Or?

Or.

OR!

- (b) You refuse all these options—which you should, you absolutely should, because positive feelings are not indicative of learning, because wrestling with difficult concepts is necessary to figuring out your relations and responsibilities in this inequitable world, because we need classrooms where professors and students can be vulnerable and reflexive and messy, and because, of course, fuck President Bob—well then.

It's time to start the story at a different place. Time is cyclical; it's time to go back. Back before that moment when you first compromised. Keep going now, back, back a little further, back perhaps to when you're reading this now.

Yes: now. Here and now, pay attention. Instead of letting yourself get isolated, letting the story of your future condense until it seems to be only about you and your individual choices in the classroom, reach out. Now. Find others who want to resist. Now. Build community. Now. And slowly, slowly, cultivate those relations. Develop your sense of possibilities. Hone your imaginations. Until you see your individual choices as a small part of something large, so large, something even the ever-encroaching fascist system can't stop. A collective wave that crashes against the system, tears it down, and evacuates space to build new relations in its wake.

Choose your own future. Together.

And start creating it now.



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