

The Only Thing to Fear – Classroom Lesson Plan

Includes Virtual Author Interview

Book Synopsis

The Only Thing to Fear by Caroline Tung Richmond is an alternate-history novel set in a world where the Axis powers won World War II and occupy the United States. Sixteen-year-old Zara St. James, a Chinese American girl with a dangerous secret ability, must navigate suspicion, loyalty, and resistance while questioning the regime she has grown up under. The novel explores themes of authoritarianism, propaganda, identity, resistance, and moral courage.

Essential Questions

- How does propaganda influence public perception?
- What responsibilities do individuals have under oppressive systems?
- How does identity shape moral decision-making?

Lesson Objective

Students will analyze how alternate history highlights real-world political dynamics and evaluate how characters navigate loyalty, fear, and resistance.

Lesson Structure (60 Minutes)

- Warm-Up (5 minutes): How can fear be used as a tool of control?
- Direct Instruction (15–20 minutes): Examine alternate history as a genre. Define key terms: authoritarianism, propaganda, resistance, dystopia.
- Guided Practice (15 minutes): In pairs, analyze a scene where Zara questions authority. Synthesis Question: How does the alternate setting deepen the novel's political themes?
- Independent Practice (15 minutes): Choice-based analytical or creative response (see below).
- Exit Ticket (5 minutes): Identify one example of moral courage in the novel.

Independent Practice Options

- Option A: Analyze how setting shapes conflict.

- Option B: Compare this alternate history to a real historical event.
- Option C: Write a short scene depicting resistance in an oppressive system.

Creative Interpretation Option

- Propaganda analysis poster
- Resistance character map
- Alternate-history timeline comparing fiction and reality

All creative responses must include an artist statement referencing specific textual evidence.

Reader Impact + Student Voice

- How does fear shape decision-making in the novel?
- What parallels can you draw between the fictional regime and real history?
- Why are alternate histories powerful tools for reflection?
- How does identity influence resistance?

Author Interview

Author interview provided by UNBAN COOLIES.
Visit: <http://www.youtube.com/@unbanCOOLIES>

Lesson materials developed in partnership with UNBAN COOLIES.