

WHATEVER IT TAKES

Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America

LESSON PLANS FOR CHAPTER ONE: THE LOTTERY

Introduction:

“Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America,” by Paul Tough, is a book that offers many opportunities to discuss the history and current issues of urban education. To help foster these discussions we have provided lesson plans that can be used in the classroom, at a community center or in your living room with high school or college age students. The objective of these lessons is to provide ideas and guiding questions to engage further dialogue around issues raised in the book. They are presented as a sequence but can be used independently as you determine which is best for the time you have.

We encourage people to write back to us on how your discussion and activities went. We will feature the best stories on the website along with a congratulations letter from Geoffrey Canada.

Goal of the Lessons:

To encourage conversations that can apply the lessons of educational reform and community building in the Harlem Children’s Zone to creating change in your own communities.

The lessons are structured as follows for you to use at your discretion:

- Each chapter of the book has three lessons that can be used in full or in its elements, in three or more sessions.
- The chapter can be read ahead of time or be integrated as a read-aloud during the course of the lesson.
- First, we offer an icebreaker to open a discussion about the themes in the book.
- Second, we offer five guiding questions for a group discussion.
 - Next to each question, we have noted the pages in the book that can be referenced for the discussion.
- Third, there’s an activity to create an opportunity for the readers to personalize the HCZ story as well as apply it to their own communities.
 - At the top of the lesson there will be a list of suggested materials for these activities.
- Fourth, there is a suggested journal writing activity based on the questions.
- Last, have fun!

Chapter 1: Lesson One of Three

Materials Needed:

Chapter I. *The Lottery* (Pages 1-20), poster board, journals, markers, pens, plastic straws, tape

Icebreaker:

Whatever it Takes! ... [*This icebreaker can be done with a parent and a teen, with a teacher and a class, with a youth worker and teens.*]

- On a big poster board (if a big group, put up enough boards for 4-5 people to work on together) write in big letters: **Whatever it Takes!**
- Everyone will have a marker and write something they would do whatever it takes to make happen. (*Examples: Go to college, Get a record contract, Stay healthy, Make a million dollars, End poverty, Make their mother happy, etc.*)
- When everyone is done, have people share and then ask why they think the author titled his book, “Whatever it Takes.”

Suggested Guiding Questions for a General Discussion:

1. What is HCZ’s mission? (Pages 5, 18 and 19)
2. What have been some of HCZ’s challenges? (Pages 2-3, 5-6)
3. What were the questions Geoffrey Canada asked himself concerning how to tackle these challenges? (Page 3-4)
4. What is Geoffrey Canada’s philosophy of education? (Pages 2-5, 8, 18-20)
5. Why did he create Promise Academy? (Pages 5-6)

Activity: Imagining your own school...

The group is broken up into teams of four (or can be done with two people). Everyone is given the same materials (poster boards, scissors, plastic straws, markers and tape) The charge is to build their own dream school. Each team should consider the following:

- The School Name
- The Neighborhood the School is In
- The Students (Grades) and Teachers
- The School Philosophy, Theme and Mission
- The School Exterior and Classroom Design
- The Subjects that would be Taught
- The School Rules
- The Role of the Parents
- The Role of the Community
- Challenges to Overcome

When completed, each new school will make a presentation about their design, mission and challenges.

Journal Write:

Reflect on one or two ideas that you read about in the book and discussed together that you will try to put into action in your school or community.

Chapter 1: Lesson Two of Three

Materials Needed:

Chapter I. *The Lottery* (Pages 1-20), strips of construction paper, markers, journals, pens.

Icebreaker:

I Promise... *[This icebreaker can be done with a parent and a teen, with a teacher and a class, with a youth worker and teens.]*

- Everyone gets three strips of construction paper (different colors) and a marker.
- On each strip everyone will write three promises:
 - I, _____ promise to _____.
 - One promise they are COMMITTED to keeping. (*I, Donnell, promise to go to college.*)
 - One promise they are NOT SURE if they can keep. (*I, Sakina, promise to always recycle plastic bottles.*)
 - One promise they will NOT be able to keep. (*I, Alicia, promise to never curse again.*)
- Once finished, the papers should be folded and put into a hat, bowl, or a shoe box.
- When everyone is done, mix up the papers in a bowl and have everyone pick three strips. If they pick their own, they will put it back in.
- People take turns reading the strips and guessing whether the promise is one the writer is committed to keeping, unsure or not able to keep.
- The writer will then respond with the true intent of the promise and why they feel that way.
- When everyone is finished, have a short discussion about the importance of knowing “What it Takes” to keep one’s “Promise.”

Suggested Guiding Questions for a General Discussion:

1. Why call the school Promise Academy? What is HCZ promising to its participants/students? (Page 12, 15)
2. What is a charter school? (Page 7) Why do charter schools select students through a lottery? (Page 8)
3. Why do you think there was a large turnout for the first Promise Academy lottery? (Pages 1-2 and 18)
4. What are some of the challenges facing low income students vs. middle income students? (Page 18)
5. Why is early childhood education and development important? (Page 13)

Activity: If I were in their shoes...

Below are some quotes from the book. Each is a basis for creating a scenario to imagine if you were in that parent’s shoes. Depending on the number of people in the group, assign the three scenes and the players will create a scene that will build on the sentiment in the quote for the characters they create for their role play. Each scene should also create a scene to show what happens next.

- SCENARIO ONE: *“Dijon Brinnard,” A whoop went up from the back of the auditorium, and a jubilant mother started edging her way out of her row, proudly clutching the hand of her four-year-old son.* (Page 16)

- SCENARIO TWO: *One disappointed woman spat out her complaint to anyone who would listen. "I think it's not fair, and I want someone to know," she said.*(Page 17)
- SCENARIO THREE: *"What I am going to remember about tonight," he said, "is how those mothers looked at me when their kids didn't get in."*(Page 20) *"We've got to do more," he said with a sigh. "We've got to give these people a chance for hope."*(Page 20)

At the end of each role play discuss how and why the mothers and Mr. Canada, as well as the other characters (created by the actors) feel and act the way they do.

The audience NOT in the performed scene should also share what they might do if they were in the same shoes.

Journal Write:

What kind of promises have you made to take your own education or your child's education more seriously?

Chapter 1: Lesson Three of Three

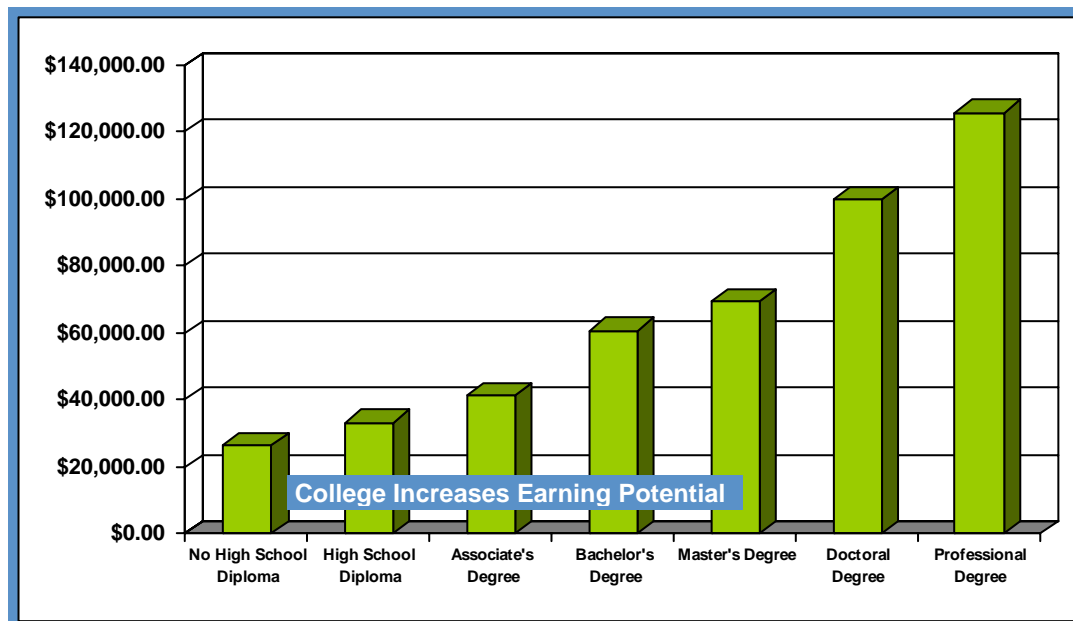
Materials Needed:

Chapter I. *The Lottery* (pages 1-20), poster boards, markers, journals, pens, poster of “College Increases Earning Potential,” cards with educational statistics (H.S. diploma, A.S., B.A., doctorate, etc.), newspaper or online list of apartment rentals and newspaper or online list of jobs and salaries.

Icebreaker:

Stopping the Cycle of Poverty...

Everyone gets a card that states the level of their education except for two people. One is a realtor and the other is a job recruiter. Depending on the group size they will be divided into 2- 4 teams. On each team, 2 people will represent the realtor and recruiter and all of the others will get cards that state their level of education. The people with the cards will have to apply for jobs or housing. The real estate agents and the recruiters will have a list of what jobs they will be able to qualify for and what housing they will be able to afford based on their level of education.



- After each person finds out what housing they can afford and jobs they can get, they will look at the “College Increases Earning Potential,” poster & discuss the average salaries of people with different levels of education.
- Discuss why education is the key to stopping the cycle of poverty.

Suggested Guiding Questions for a General Discussion:

1. What is generational poverty? (Page 2)
2. What are some of the problems with the public school system? (Pages 5-6)
3. What is the role of the Promise Academy Board of Directors? (Pages 9-10)
4. What kind of role should government, corporations, individuals and families have in ensuring ALL children have a high quality education and equal opportunities for success? (The entire chapter)
5. How is the concept of accountability discussed in the book? (Page 10)

Activity: Debating the Question:

“Will there always be a class of people in America who will not be able to fully compete because the game is fixed against them?” (Page 18)

- Based on the size of the group, divide into two teams (with one moderator) or four teams (a moderator for each of two teams)
- One or two teams will argue why they think there will always be a class of people not able to compete.
- The other teams will argue that the game’s playing field CAN be changed.
- Each side will use the book and research (see website links below) other material to support their arguments.

Journal Write:

With the new presidential administration, what policies would you recommend be enacted to ensure that every child, no matter the economic background, receives a high quality education from kindergarten through college graduation.