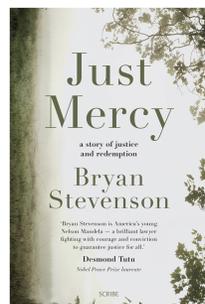


Introduction

- The Common Reading Experience has been part of the University of Mississippi freshman curriculum since 2011.
- Through the shared reading of a book, this program aims “to develop skills...to gain an emerging sense of confidence...to develop a sense of community...and connections...(umreads.olemiss.edu)”
- The Intensive English Program offers basic to advanced level courses for non-native English speakers. Topics in Intercultural Communication is an advanced level content-based course.
- In the Fall of 2017, students enrolled in Intercultural Communication came from China, Germany, Korea, The Netherlands, and Vietnam.

Purpose

- To create a common reading course for international students adapting the curriculum guide for the 2017 common reading experience text, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson.
- To engage international students (non-native English speakers) in critical thinking, reading, and writing, through a common reading course.



Procedure

- The instructor selected activities, assignments, and assessment measures from the UM curriculum guide based on their language difficulty, cultural relevancy, usefulness in critical thinking, and student engagement.
- Short lectures were designed to provide background information on topics in U.S. History (slavery, Civil Rights), the American legal system, as well as current events (Black Lives Matter).
- A vocabulary bank was created for some chapters to aid reading comprehension.
- After each chapter, students were given a chapter summary and reading comprehension questions (Random House Teacher’s Guide)
- Students attended campus-wide lectures and other events to support the reading of *Just Mercy*.
- Field trips on and off-campus enhanced comprehension and further discussion of topics from the book (courthouse, police, monuments).
- Reading comprehension quizzes and tests were given after 3-4 chapters; alternative forms of assessment were used throughout the course as well (Presentations, Visual Reading Response)

Results

- Students were overwhelmed at first with the amount of reading assigned, vocabulary, and discussion questions.
- At times, the short lectures before chapters took a large amount of class time.
- Some students were hesitant at first to discuss issues from the book (race, justice) or to talk about personal experiences. As the weeks progressed, students grew more comfortable and were able to tackle difficult subjects of discussion.
- The activities/assignments that students found most helpful were the vocabulary bank, chapter summaries, lectures, and field trips.
- Students enjoyed comparing/contrasting topics related to U.S. culture and their own.
- Overall, students demonstrated a sophisticated level of critical thinking skills (Visual Reading Response, Identity Project) despite their language skills.

Implications

- Chapter summaries and vocabulary banks were highly effective for reading comprehension and class discussion.
- Experiential learning (field trips) facilitated class discussion and supported comprehension of the book.
- Taking into account students’ linguistic and cultural background, curriculum for UM freshmen can be adapted for international students.