

Identification and Division: Pushing Back Against Scapegoating

First read your assigned section below. Read carefully, but do not try to analyze the selection or remember details. It's just a piece of text you encountered.

When everyone has finished reading we will do a freewriting activity. When I say go, think about the passage you read and write whatever comes to mind. Keep writing non-stop for seven minutes. Do not worry about grammar or spelling. If you can't think of anything to write, write "thinking, thinking, thinking" until you think of something else to write. If you can't think of a word, just leave a blank, or write "later." If the word you think of is not in English, write the word you know. Whatever you do, don't stop writing until seven minutes are up. Keep your pen, your pencil, or your fingers on your keyboard moving.

Selection 1:

And *then* he realized why he was thinking like this.

It was because he wanted there to be conspirators. It was much better to imagine men in some smoky room somewhere, made mad and cynical by privilege and power, plotting over the brandy. You had to cling to this sort of image, because if you didn't then you might have to face the fact that bad things happened because ordinary people, the kind who brushed the dog and told their children bedtime stories, were capable of then going out and doing horrible things to other ordinary people. It was so much easier to blame it on Them. It was bleakly depressing to think that They were Us. If it was Them, then nothing was anyone's fault. If it was Us, what did that make Me? After all, I'm one of Us. I must be. I've certainly never thought of myself as one of Them. *No one* ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We're always one of Us. It's Them that do the bad things.

Selection 2:

As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people, and always in concentrating it on a single enemy. The more uniformly the fighting will of a people is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow. It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause.

As soon as the wavering masses find themselves confronted with too many enemies, objectivity at once steps in, and the question is raised whether actually all the others are wrong and their own nation or their own movement alone is right.

Also with this comes the first paralysis of their own strength. Therefore, a number of essentially different enemies must always be regarded as one in such a way that in the opinion of the mass of one's own adherents the war is being waged against one enemy alone. This strengthens the belief in one's own cause and increases one's bitterness against the attacker.

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Scapegoating does not solve actual problems. It is a process used by powerful people to redirect blame for problems onto an individual or unfortunate other group. It singles out a particular individual or group to take the blame for problems shared by the whole. It operates rhetorically and ritualistically and is essentially a kind of magical thinking. Today we will explore the history of scapegoating, the process by which it is deployed, and what we can do in our classrooms and communities to ameliorate it.

The session will proceed as follows:

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
2. Reading of assigned selections in small groups (10 minutes)
3. Responding to selections in a seven-minute freewrite (10 minutes)
4. Freewrite share out (10 minutes)
5. Introduction to Burke's concepts and the scapegoating process (10 minutes)
6. Small group discussion: Classroom strategies and countermeasures (15 minutes)
7. Group share out (10 minutes)
8. Final thoughts (5 minutes)