



Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis

Author & Activist

Finding Wisdom in Pain

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on October 13, 2022 by Nancy Steiner

- Access *The Thread* episode of Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Explore the intersection of faith, service, and activism
- Explore the tenet: Speak truth to power
- For Psychology courses: Explore human and character development, trauma, healing
- For Religion courses: Explore the power of prayer as a vehicle to address injustice

English Language Arts Focus

- Inspire students to tell their own coming-of-age stories
- Explore identity and voice
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one author and activist
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Use Rev. Dr. Lewis' episode as evidence to write a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay

Episode Overview

Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis recalls how difficult childhood experiences shaped her commitment to activism. She shares her belief in the interconnectedness of humanity, advocates for conscious voting and learning from diverse perspectives, emphasizes the importance of self-love as a foundation for “fierce-love,” and acknowledges the power of individuals to make a positive impact to change the world.



Biography

Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis is Senior Minister at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. She is the first African American and first woman to serve in that position, which dates to 1628. A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and Drew University, she is the creator of the MSNBC online show *Just Faith*, and the PBS show *Faith and Justice*, in which she led important conversations about culture and current events. Lewis is an activist, preacher, and fierce advocate for racial equality, economic justice, and LGBTQIA+ equality. Her activism around these issues has been featured in media such as *The Today Show*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Essence*, and *The Huffington Post*. In addition, Lewis is the author of several books, including *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-racial*, and *Multicultural Congregations* (2008), *10 Essential Strategies to Grow a Multiracial, Multicultural Congregation* (2018), the children's book *You Are So Wonderful!* (2020) and *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the Word* (2022).

Photos: Jacqueline Lewis with mom and sister, Wanda. (Jacqueline Lewis Instagram) left; Jacqueline Lewis speaking. (Jacqueline Lewis Instagram) right



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

- Read the opening of Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis' episode aloud to students:

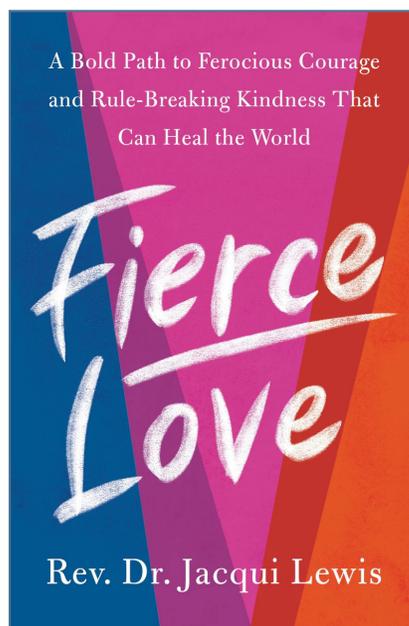
"It's interesting to me that almost all the world's major religions have some kind of love neighbor, love self, parallel in there. So in that dynamic, there's a you and others. So I'm sorry, how are you in love with the other If you don't love you, you just can't really do it. I want to raise a people who know how to love themselves. That's the work."



- Ask and Discuss: What do you learn about Lewis from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?

- Next, have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on what she shared or have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings from this opening.

- Last, as a class discuss the reasons they think the filmmakers choose this opening for the episode?



Photos: Jacqueline Lewis with her father at her graduation. (Jacqueline Lewis Instagram) top: Cover of "Fierce Love", by Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis. (Jacqueline Lewis) lower left; Senior Minister Dr Jacqueline Lewis Special service for Trayvon Martin at Middle Collegiate Church New York City, USA. March 25, 2012. (Alamy) lower right



Teaching Tip:

***THE THREAD* Up Close**

After watching the interview, have students debrief her life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ What did you learn from Rev. Dr. Lewis about finding wisdom in pain? What does the title of her episode mean to you after listening to her stories?
- ▣ What story did you connect with from her interview?
- ▣ What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from her story?

After discussing, have students return to ***The Thread*** episode and engage students in a close read and analysis of her interview using the video and transcript. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning ***The Thread*** with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of ***A Thread*** connection: If there is a unit of study on human development, students could select this passage to share out. (*Note: This excerpt has been edited for clarity and brevity.*):

"You know, one of the ways that I think about human development as a psychologist, is that there is a kind of an inner family system. I'm not talking about multiple personality disorder, but I am saying at different stages of my life, that girl that got called the N word at five, and the girl who didn't have any breasts when she was 12 and everybody else did... so I think about comforting, encouraging myself. So many of us who've had childhood trauma have a piece of ourselves, a piece of our inner life that is that wounded child. And our job as adults is to protect that inner child, to put our arms around that child and help that child feel safe and cared for and help that child grow up. I've done that for myself. I've cared for myself through therapy and coaching so that the little one in me, my therapist is the little one in me, sometimes has a big thing to say. So I listen to that and I feel like there's wisdom there. That comes from my wounding and comes from my growing up. Every single experience that has happened to me has made me, me. Therefore, though it hurts, though I wouldn't wish it, I claim it as part of my identity and it makes me strong."



Connections

- ❑ What ideas and values connect Rev. Dr. Lewis to what you are studying today?
- ❑ How did people and events in her childhood prepare her to become an activist?
- ❑ What resonated with you most from this episode? What ideas do you want to explore more?
- ❑ After listening to Rev. Dr. Lewis, how do you understand the idea of loving oneself, or being curious about yourself differently?
- ❑ What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from her stories?



Activity: Finding Wisdom in Pain

Rev. Dr. Lewis weaves many ideas throughout her episode on “the work,” the work of activists, the work of being seen, the work of healing, the work of honoring pain, and the work of fierce love which is “having the courage to to cross lines, to to break rules, to have extraordinary connecting compassion.”

Find someone in your community, or in history, who you believe reflects this work of fierce love. Write a short biography of who they are, what they do, or why you feel they practice fierce love. Be prepared to share why you choose this person to research and prepare a brief overview of them to share in class.



Additional Resources

- ❑ Connect to Rev. Dr. Lewis’s memory of Chicago after Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination: [“What Happened During the Westside Riots of 1968?”](#), *Chicago Magazine*: [Middle Church](#)
- ❑ Research her many books including: [Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation](#), [The Power of Stories, a Guide for Leaders in Multiracial, Multicultural Congregations](#), the children’s book [You Are So Wonderful!](#), and a contributing chapter to [Becoming Like Creoles: Living and Leading at the Intersections of Injustice, Culture and Religion](#). Her newest book is [Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World](#).
- ❑ Read the June Jordan [“Poem for South African Women”](#) Rev. Dr. Lewis refers to at the end of her episode.

