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Critical Reading Reflection (CRR)

Directions:

- While you read/listen/watch—think about the 4 C's and make notes in the spaces below. Be sure to include evidence/quotes from the text (article, podcast, documentary, etc.) to help draw clear connections between your reflections and the text. Use the Feelings Wheel at the bottom to help you answer some of the questions.

Title of Article/Podcast/Video:	
Concepts	**Connections**
1: Trauma Decontextualized Becomes Identity One important concept in Menakem's podcast is his idea that trauma becomes normalized when it is not examined. He explains, "Trauma decontextualized over time in a person can look like personality… in a family can look like family traits… in a people can look like culture." This reframes behaviors that society often judges as flaws. Rather than viewing certain reactions as defects, he suggests they are survival strategies shaped by historical and racialized trauma. This concept is powerful because it challenges individual blame and redirects attention to structural and historical conditions that shape behavior.	**1. Connection 1 (Everyday Life / Other Classes)** In my view, every person responds to situations through the lens of lived experience and socialization. In a classroom, both instructors and students bring multidimensional perspectives shaped by identity, history, and embodied memory. As a leader, it becomes the responsibility of the instructor to cultivate a space where these perspectives can be engaged respectfully and balanced within a vibrant classroom culture. Menakem's idea deepens this responsibility. When he states that trauma can appear as "personality" or even "culture," he reminds us that reactions are rarely isolated or purely individual. In classroom discussions about inequality, marginalized students are sometimes labeled as "angry" or "overly sensitive." Through Menakem's framework, those responses may reflect protection rather than defect. He further explains that when there is "no repair and no remembrance that the trauma happened," trauma becomes embedded and misunderstood. This insight directly applies to classroom dynamics: when historical context is ignored, emotional responses can be misread as personality flaws. His perspective reinforces my belief that educators must contextualize reactions rather than dismiss them. A respectful learning environment requires recognizing that what appears as overreaction may actually be embodied history expressing itself. **Connection 2 (How It Landed in My Body)** Listening to this concept also turned my reflection inward. When Menakem described trauma becoming normalized over time, I felt a quiet heaviness in my chest. The idea unsettled me because it suggests that

	aspects of identity--whether restraint, intensity, guardedness, or urgency--may be shaped by accumulated experiences rather than inherent temperament. The phrase “no repair and no remembrance” stayed with me physically. It created a sense of seriousness and attentiveness. Rather than feeling defensive, I felt reflective. It made me more aware of how easily embodied responses, both mine and others’, can be misinterpreted when history is not acknowledged. The embodiment here was introspective: it invited me to slow down and consider what histories might be present beneath reactions in moments of tension.
Concept 2: White Body Supremacy as an Embodied Structural Standard Another important concept emerges when Menakem states, “We live in a structure… by which the white body deems and has deemed itself the supreme standard by which all bodies, humanity shall be measured structurally and philosophically.” He is not describing individual prejudice; he is naming an organizing logic. In this structure, whiteness functions as the normative baseline against which other bodies are measured. By framing this in terms of the body, Menakem makes clear that power is not only institutional but embodied. This shifts the discussion away from individual attitudes and toward a system that unevenly distributes legitimacy, safety, and value.	**Connection 1 (Everyday Life / Other Classes)** This framework sharpened how I interpret classroom discussions about race and equity. When Menakem asks, “diverse from what?”, he exposes the hidden standard that diversity initiatives often leave unnamed. In academic spaces, systemic racism may be acknowledged, but the norm itself is rarely interrogated. In my experience, it is important to clarify that structural critique is not personal accusation. Discussions about white supremacy analyze historical systems of power, not the moral worth of individual white students. Critiquing the structure that positioned whiteness as the standard is different from criticizing white people as individuals. Making this distinction is essential for maintaining respectful and productive dialogue. At the same time, contextual marginalization can occur in specific situations, but isolated experiences do not negate broader structural hierarchies. Structural advantage operates historically and institutionally, even when individual experiences vary. In classroom culture, this means encouraging reflection without inducing guilt or embarrassment. The goal is awareness—examining how norms such as “professionalism,”

	"neutrality," or "objectivity" may have been historically shaped—rather than assigning blame. **Connection 2 (How It Landed in My Body)** Unlike the reflective embodiment of the first concept, this one produced a sharper awareness of structural asymmetry. When Menakem described watching January 6—seeing "nooses," "gallows," and "swastikas," while police "never unholstered their weapon"—his structural claim became concrete. I felt tension in my shoulders and a tightening in my jaw. The reaction was not introspective; it was a bodily recognition of imbalance. When he explains that whiteness carries "currency" in this structure, it made the uneven distribution of protection and legitimacy feel tangible. The discomfort I experienced was not about personal identity but about understanding how institutions can respond differently depending on who occupies a space. My body reacted before my intellect fully processed the implications. This embodiment was political rather than personal. It reinforced the importance of distinguishing systemic analysis from personal accusation. The intensity of the realization came from recognizing how normalized such asymmetries can become. The structure Menakem describes is not abstract—it operates through law enforcement, institutional norms, and public response—and sensing that reality physically made the concept more immediate and concrete.
Challenges One idea that created discomfort for me was Menakem's insistence that structural analysis must be sober and unsentimental. His description of January 6, combined with his statement that whiteness carries "currency" within the structure, pushed me to confront the depth of asymmetry in institutional responses. The discomfort did not stem from disagreement, but from the weight of recognizing how normalized these patterns are. Another moment of tension arose when he discussed protection and preparedness, particularly when he stated, "Non-violence does not mean non-protection." I have long associated moral integrity with principled nonviolence. His framing complicated that assumption. It forced me to examine whether my understanding of nonviolence is shaped by contexts where protection was structurally more available.	**Changes** This learning did not radically overturn my beliefs, but it sharpened them. It moved my thinking from abstract acknowledgment of systemic racism toward a more embodied understanding of how structures operate through norms, responses, and legitimacy. Menakem's framing encouraged me to differentiate more clearly between structural critique and personal accusation — a distinction that is essential in classroom settings. His concept that trauma can be mistaken for personality shifted how I interpret emotional intensity, both in others and in myself. I am more attentive now to the possibility that what appears as reaction may reflect accumulated history. This awareness deepens my commitment to contextualizing behavior rather than personalizing it.

That realization produced unease because it required me to question whether certain moral positions can function differently depending on one's location within power hierarchies. Additionally, his critique of DEI as insufficient to address "400 years of charge" unsettled me. As someone who values dialogue and institutional reform, I felt resistance to the idea that many equity efforts may be structurally constrained from producing transformative change. The discomfort came from recognizing that good intentions and representation alone may not disrupt deeply embedded norms. It challenged the comfort of incremental progress narratives.	The podcast also made me more conscious of how neutrality is often assumed rather than interrogated. I now find myself asking more frequently: what is the baseline? Who defined it? Whose norms are being protected? These questions feel less rhetorical and more necessary. Perhaps most significantly, Menakem's insistence that structural change is long-term — that what took centuries to build will not dissolve quickly — adjusted my expectations. Instead of imagining resolution, I am thinking more in terms of stamina, clarity, and sustained responsibility. The learning did not leave me with certainty; it left me with attentiveness.