

First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 2

Episode Transcript: Lessie (Gracie) Wilborn on "Striving to Learn"

What is going down today, beautiful people! We have finally made it to this week's episode of Amazing Gracie: How Sweet is My Sound! Today, I am going to take a slight detour from the normal formatting and bring you an "I believe" style podcast. Recently, I've been introduced to the 4 dimensions of Global Awareness. These dimensions give us a step-by-step process to better understand the world around us.

Dimension one is Cultivating Self-Awareness and Integrity. Two is striving to learn. Three is demonstrating empathy and respect for difference, and the fourth is Collaborating and Contributing to a Global Society

Today I will be discussing the second dimension, Striving to Learn, and looking at cultural awareness.

I believe that social and cultural awareness is the greatest contribution to global awareness because one must understand the differences of one another and be able to put oneself in the other person's shoes.

I am a person who comes from multiple races and backgrounds. My father is black, and my mother is white. Therefore, I draw from experiences from both demographics. However, many do not understand my unique situation. Growing up in a small, predominantly White community brought many challenges. Before entering this community, virtually no Black people lived in this small town.

I remember, on my first day of kindergarten, many students were curious as to my differing appearance. My skin was much darker than theirs, and my hair was in tight cornrows with colorful beads on the ends. I was the first Black person these students had ever seen.

At the time, I didn't understand the impact of meeting me on those young impressionable minds. Almost everyone asked why is your skin brown or why do you have beads in your hair? My intellectual response as a six-year-old was, "I don't know, I was born this way".

My response opened their minds to many different possibilities after being sheltered in such a small community.

They were finally introduced to the cultural and social awareness horizon. You could see the dozens of questions that were formulating in their minds, wanting to learn and understand more. The students were impressionable. One of my classmates already was aware of the ways of Black people through a degrading and negative viewpoint.

On my first day of kindergarten, I was called the N-word for the first time. The teachers freaked out at this word, but I just stood there like, what is going on? I had no meaning of the word. I looked at him in confusion. He puffed his chest and was proud of his word, a word that he did not truly understand. This child learned his cultural awareness from people who had no right to share about Black culture. His young, impressionable mind was being contorted to believe the experiences of Black culture from those who did not have the first-hand experience of what it is like to be Black.

When I returned home from school, I told my mom of the word that boy used to describe me. She was mortified, and a glimmer of hope died in her eyes. She explained to me that it was a mean word, a word used to show anger and hate towards a person, towards someone different, someone people feared.

I could not understand why someone did not like me for my skin color. It's not like I chose it. Believe me, if I could choose which color, I wouldn't have picked anything normal. Can you imagine having a one-on-one conversation with the quote-on-quote Great Creator asking for purple skin?

I can already see that playing out "Sorry, purple is unavailable at this location. However, we have lovely shades of tan and brown in our American collection. This season, almond is quite popular."

I had to make myself culturally aware of my heritage. I learned the true meaning of that vile word. I learned of the hate, the suffering, the bloodshed, fear, hardships, and sacrifices connected to a single word.

Looking back upon my first day of kindergarten, I finally was able to see how sheltered this community was. However, there is hope for change as the spread of social and cultural awareness takes place. During my freshman year of high school, we were required to read the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Before engaging with the story, we did a small research activity to understand the racial injustices: the Jim Crow Laws, lynching, and the rise of the KKK, in that era. Students became culturally aware of what happened, what continues to happen, in the world around them. In my section of English was the boy who called me the N-word in kindergarten. After the class was over, he pulled me to the side and apologized for his actions. He admitted to not knowing, not understanding, what he was doing at the time. Seeing the hardships, devastation, and injustice opened his eyes. He learned the truth and became aware of those around him.

Cultural and social awareness are the building blocks of global awareness. I believe that if more people were socially and culturally aware, more people would be aware of the events happening every day. It is important to understand the differences of one another; otherwise, no progress will be made to make a positive change in our world.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Amazing Gracie: How Sweet is My Sound

Sound attributions

JuliuH. "Scoring Melancholy - Emotionally Sad Piano Music".

Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/music/solo-piano-scoring-melancholy-emotionally-sad-piano-music-8011/>

Lesfm. "Goodbye Stress - Calming Acoustic Guitar Instrumental Backgrounds For Music Videos".

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Wataboi. "Cali". Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/music/search/wataboi/>