

Teaching Difficult Histories through Migration Literature: An Empathy-Based Inclusive Pedagogical Framework

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ABSTRACT:

Histories of forced migration remain difficult to teach because they enter the university classroom not simply as completed events, but through inherited memories, contested narratives and uneven relations to the past. Migration literature can bring students closer to the lived consequences of displacement; however, such encounters do not automatically produce historically informed or ethically responsible understanding. This paper develops an empathy-based inclusive pedagogical framework for teaching difficult histories through migration literature in higher education. Adopting a conceptual and integrative approach, it brings scholarship on difficult histories, literary learning, empathy and inclusive pedagogy into a shared conversation. The framework reconceptualizes empathy as a pedagogically cultivated form of engagement that must remain historically situated, critically reflexive and inclusively enacted. These principles are organized through five connected movements: historical and positional grounding, situated literary encounter, multiperspectival reading, dialogic inquiry and reflective reorientation. Partition literature is used as an illustrative pedagogical medium, not as the paper's central object of literary analysis, to demonstrate how narrative can connect historical context with lived experience while preserving difference and interpretive complexity. The paper argues that the value of empathy lies not in emotional identification alone, but in the conditions through which students are enabled to question, revise and extend their understanding. Its contribution lies in positioning inclusive pedagogy as the condition that makes empathic engagement historically responsible, critically demanding and meaningfully accessible across diverse university classrooms.

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Introduction

Some histories resist fading into the past. While the events may belong to another time, their after-effects persist in shaping identities, political discourse, collective memory, and everyday experiences across generations. Histories of violence forced migration, and displacement seldom stay limited to archives or official records; rather, they are endured through family legacies, inherited memories, silences, and conflicting narratives about the past. As a result, when these histories enter the university classroom, they do not come as impartial collections of historical knowledge ready for interpretation. Students come across them from various historical, cultural, and personal backgrounds. Their understandings are shaped not only by historical evidence but also by prior experiences, social identities, and the narratives through which these histories have been interpreted. Teaching migration history is a challenge, as it is much more than merely conveying historical information. It involves establishing environments where students can question established beliefs, interact with diverse viewpoints, and cultivate a richer comprehension of experiences that may extend beyond their own social or cultural contexts.

In history education, such subjects are difficult not simply because they involve violence or injustice, but because they remain emotionally and politically contested in the present. As Phillips argues, "The study of history can be emotive and controversial where there is actual or perceived unfairness to people by another individual or group in the past. This may also be the case where there are disparities between what is taught in school history,

family/community histories and other histories. Such issues and disparities create a strong resonance with students in particular educational settings." (Phillips, 2009, p. 119). The significance of this observation stems from the fact that students rarely enter the classroom without prior knowledge of the past. Historical learning is thus never just about history; it also involves memory, identity, and perspective. As a result, the educator's role evolves. Rather than simply presenting historical knowledge, teaching must encourage critical engagement with competing narratives, prompting students to question inherited assumptions and help them recognize that historical understanding is shaped by interpretation as much as evidence. Recognizing this difficulty also requires clarity about why such histories are taught. Phillips (2009) warns that the Holocaust and slavery may become a mere "catalogue of atrocities" when educational objectives remain undefined (p. 117). Awareness of suffering alone is therefore insufficient. Teaching should enable students to examine the historical conditions and structures that produced violence, as well as the ways its consequences continue to shape the present. Otherwise, emotional exposure risks replacing historical analysis rather than deepening it.

One approach to tackling this challenge involves turning to migration literature. The term itself resists a narrow definition, having been used to refer variously to literature written by migrant authors, texts concerned with experiences of migration, and the ways in which migration shapes literary form and representation. Recent scholarship consequently treats migration

literature as a broad field rather than one determined solely by the biography of the writer. Adair et al. (2025), for instance, define it as encompassing “a broad range of literary texts and critical approaches that cover the spectrum between voluntary and forced migration” across different genres and geographical contexts (p. 3). Such a formulation allows migration literature to accommodate different conditions and experiences of movement without assuming that migration follows a single trajectory. Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014) similarly caution against identifying a work as migration literature simply because its author has experienced migration, shifting attention instead towards the ways in which migration is represented and negotiated within the literary work. Within this broader understanding, the present study uses migration literature to refer specifically to literary narratives in which migration, displacement and their consequences form a sustained part of the represented experience. Its concern is particularly with narratives of forced migration, where movement is shaped by circumstances such as political violence, conflict, persecution or territorial rupture rather than by mobility alone. Such narratives are significant not simply because movement occurs within them, but because they attend to what displacement leaves behind and what it continues to produce: altered relationships with home and place, fractured or changing forms of belonging, questions of identity and memory, and the difficult process of negotiating life after displacement. As Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014) observe, migration does not necessarily conclude with departure from the homeland and entry into another place; its effects may continue through the reflections and adjustments that surround and follow movement. It is this extended understanding of migration, rather than movement alone, that makes migration literature particularly relevant to the teaching of difficult histories. Historical scholarship provides indispensable knowledge about political events, social change and historical causation, yet literature offers access to dimensions of historical experience that are often difficult to capture through documentary evidence alone. Literary narratives therefore create opportunities

for students to move beyond understanding history as a sequence of events towards recognizing its human consequences. However, the educational value of literature should not be assumed simply because it presents personal experience. Exposure to narratives of suffering does not necessarily produce deeper historical understanding, nor does emotional engagement inevitably lead students to question their own assumptions or appreciate perspectives different from their own. Literature undoubtedly opens possibilities for engagement, but those possibilities are realized only through thoughtful pedagogical practice. Thus, the question is not whether literature can support meaningful learning, but how educators can structure classroom engagement to make literary narratives sites of critical inquiry rather than merely passive emotional consumption. Responding to this pedagogical problem, the present paper develops an empathy-based inclusive framework for teaching difficult histories through migration literature in higher education. It argues that literary narratives of forced migration do not, by themselves, produce empathic or historically responsible understanding. Their educational possibilities depend on how experiences of displacement are placed in historical context, questioned through discussion and reconsidered within an inclusive learning environment. The framework examines how an initial emotional response to literature may be developed into inquiry that is grounded in history, open to self-questioning and attentive to differences of perspective.

Empathy, a highly debated but central idea in educational theory, is sure to come up in the course of the conversation. Because it is linked to understanding other people's perspectives, being more ethically conscious, and having a better grasp of interpersonal dynamics, empathy is often touted as a necessary result of immersing oneself in stories of human experience. Nevertheless, according to Zhou, there are still various and frequently contradictory definitions of empathy used in educational research. He states *"The fact that scientists have offered a myriad of inconsistent definitions of the term empathy is indicative of the complexity of the concept... There is,*

therefore, a need to offer an updated review of what has been traded under the umbrella term of empathy by those writing in the scholarship of teaching and learning." (Zhou, 2022, p. 1). Such conceptual ambiguity presents a significant challenge to higher education. If empathy is not adequately theorized, it becomes difficult to determine what educators are attempting to cultivate through literary engagement, as well as how such learning might be recognized in class. More importantly, the assumption that empathy develops naturally through reading ignores the active role of pedagogy in shaping students' reactions to literary texts. Phillips further contends that *"History is a subject which should not shrink from controversy.... If history is taught well it can help young people face fears and develop a more informed and deeper understanding. Significantly history can also help young people to see things from different viewpoints"* (2009, p. 118). Although Phillips is concerned specifically with the responsibilities of history education, his observation also clarifies why literary narratives may be introduced into the teaching of difficult histories. Migration literature does not replace historical inquiry. It offers an encounter, shaped by narrative form and perspective, with lives affected by historical violence and displacement. Whether that encounter develops into historically grounded perspective-taking depends on how the literary text is placed in context, discussed and questioned within the classroom. Empathic engagement is therefore shaped through teaching rather than produced by literature alone.

The discussion above suggests that the challenge of teaching difficult histories cannot be addressed simply by introducing literary narratives into the curriculum or by assuming that encounters with lived experience will naturally cultivate empathy. Although scholarship has contributed significantly to discussions of difficult histories, empathy, literary learning and inclusive education, these areas have largely developed alongside one another rather than within a coherent pedagogical structure, leaving educators with limited guidance on how they might be integrated within higher education classrooms.

Zhou (2022) notes that there is a *"strong consensus in the field of educational research"* that empathy is *"highly effective in promoting student learning"* (p. 3), while Rogers describes a high degree of empathy as *"possibly the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning"* (Rogers, 1969, as cited in Zhou, 2022, p. 3). Yet recognizing empathy as a valuable educational outcome does not explain how it is to be cultivated when students encounter histories of violence, displacement and loss through literature. Literary narratives may bring students into contact with experiences beyond their own, but without careful historical contextualization, discussion and reflection, such encounters may remain emotional, selective or detached from the conditions that produced them. It is this unresolved pedagogical space that forms the point of departure for the present paper.

The paper proposes an empathy-based inclusive pedagogical framework for teaching difficult histories through literary narratives of forced migration in higher education, arguing that empathic engagement is not an inevitable consequence of reading but must be intentionally cultivated through inclusive instructional design. By bringing scholarship on difficult histories, empathy, literary learning and inclusive pedagogy into dialogue, the framework offers a structured means of guiding students towards historically informed, ethically responsible and critically reflective engagement with displacement. The 1947 Partition of British India provides the principal historical context through which this framework is illustrated. Accompanying the end of British colonial rule, Partition divided the subcontinent into the independent states of India and Pakistan and precipitated mass movement across newly created borders. The territorial division was accompanied by widespread communal violence, dispossession and one of the largest migrations of the twentieth century, transforming what appeared politically as a transfer of power and territorial reorganization into a profound experience of social rupture (Khan, 2007). Its consequences, however, cannot be contained within the political events of 1947. Drawing upon oral histories, Butalia (2000) demonstrates

how Partition entered homes, families and intimate relationships through displacement, separation, abduction, loss and violence, bringing into view experiences that remained less visible within dominant narratives of independence and nation-making. Partition therefore refers here not simply to the creation of new national boundaries, but to a historical rupture whose consequences continued through displaced lives, fractured communities, contested memories and altered relationships to home and belonging.

It is within this historical and cultural aftermath that Partition literature takes shape. In the present paper, the term refers to literary narratives that represent, revisit or emerge from the 1947 Partition of British India and its continuing consequences. Rather than constituting a single or internally uniform literary record of the event, Partition literature encompasses writing shaped by different linguistic, regional, religious, gendered and generational locations. Its narratives engage not only with mass displacement and communal violence but also with the ways in which political rupture enters private and everyday life through disrupted homes and relationships, gendered vulnerability, altered forms of belonging, inherited memory and silence. Partition literature is therefore approached here neither as a transparent record of historical experience nor as a substitute for historical evidence, but as a literary field through which the lived and remembered consequences of Partition are represented and negotiated. It provides the illustrative context for the present paper because it allows the proposed framework to consider how students encounter experiences of forced migration through narrative while remaining attentive to historical specificity, literary mediation and differences of perspective.

Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual and integrative approach to develop an empathy-based inclusive pedagogical framework for teaching difficult histories through literary narratives of forced migration in higher education. It does not examine classroom outcomes through an

empirical study. Instead, it brings into conversation four bodies of scholarship that speak directly to the educational problem at the center of the paper: difficult histories, literary learning, empathy in education and inclusive pedagogy. Difficult-history scholarship clarifies the emotional and political demands of contested pasts; literary-learning and empathy research illuminate the possibilities and limits of perspective-taking; and inclusive pedagogy draws attention to the unequal positions from which students participate. The framework develops through a critical reading of these four areas in relation to one another, particularly where one exposes a limitation in another. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive review of each field, but to draw out the concepts and tensions that are most useful for shaping a coherent approach to teaching.

Partition literature is used as an illustrative pedagogical context through which the framework is made concrete. It is not treated as the primary object of literary analysis, nor is the paper intended to prescribe a fixed method for teaching Partition. Its purpose is to show how the conceptual framework may be translated into pedagogical application: how empathy may be cultivated through teaching rather than presumed as an automatic outcome of reading, and how such engagement can remain historically informed, critically reflective and attentive to the diversity of the university classroom.

Literature Review

The scholarship on difficult histories begins from the recognition that the past does not enter the classroom as settled knowledge. Histories of violence, displacement and collective rupture are often already present through family memories, public commemorations and national narratives before they become subjects of formal study. Phillips (2009) consequently locates the emotive and controversial character of history not only in the disturbing nature of particular events, but also in the disparities between institutional accounts, community histories and perceptions of past injustice. Historical empathy offers a useful response to

this problem because it joins affective engagement to disciplined historical thought. Endacott and Brooks (2013) conceptualize it through the interaction of contextualization, perspective-taking and affective connection, insisting that students approach historical actors within the circumstances that shaped their choices rather than imagining the past through present-day assumptions. Although developed within school-based history education, its emphasis on context, evidence and the limits of identification remains useful here. This scholarship establishes that difficult histories require more than factual or emotional exposure. Because forced migration is also lived through memory, silence and altered relationships to home, literary narrative becomes particularly significant where historical explanation alone cannot make these intimate consequences available.

Literary scholarship explains what narrative may contribute to this encounter, but it also cautions against locating educational transformation within the text itself. Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional account of reading places meaning within the relationship between reader and text, recognizing that interpretation is shaped by the knowledge, memories and expectations a reader brings to the act of reading. Keen's (2006, 2007) work on narrative empathy develops this difficulty further. Narrative voice, characterization and access to consciousness may invite emotional responsiveness and perspective-taking, yet the movement from literary immersion to ethical understanding cannot be assumed. Research on migration and exile narratives offers support for their pedagogical value, but within more specific educational settings. Eide et al. (2023), for instance, examine such texts in foreign-language education and argue that they can widen intercultural perspectives and unsettle monocultural assumptions. Their work does not directly address difficult-history teaching in higher education, but it reinforces an important point for the present study: migration literature becomes educationally productive through contextualization and carefully designed classroom engagement, not through textual

exposure alone. Literature therefore offers neither a transparent route into another experience nor a guaranteed means of humanizing history.

Once literary engagement is valued for bringing students closer to lives beyond their own, the question of empathy becomes unavoidable; however, the scholarship gives little reason to treat empathy as a simple or uniformly beneficial outcome. Zhou's (2022) review shows that educational research uses the term to describe cognitive perspective-taking, affective responsiveness, care, compassion and more enduring dispositions, often without distinguishing clearly among them. Familiarity and perceived similarity may determine whose suffering becomes readily intelligible, leaving socially, culturally or morally difficult figures beyond the reader's attention (Zhou, 2022). Boler (1999) questions passive forms of empathy that allow observers to feel concern while leaving their own interpretive position untouched. Within higher education, Zembylas (2012) develops strategic empathy as a way of working through emotional resistance, ambiguity and the troubled knowledge students may bring into discussions of injustice. Empathy becomes educationally meaningful, in this account, when students are asked why one perspective invited closeness, which prior assumptions shaped that response, what historical knowledge complicated it and which experiences remained difficult to recognize. Literary engagement may begin with feeling, but its pedagogical value depends upon whether feeling opens further inquiry or merely confirms the reader's sense of being compassionate.

Even a historically grounded and critically reflexive account of empathy remains incomplete if it assumes that all students can enter such demanding inquiry under the same conditions. The question of whose perspective receives attention within a narrative is inseparable from the question of whose interpretation can become audible within the classroom. Inclusive pedagogy addresses this problem by relocating attention from presumed learner limitations towards the design of ordinary teaching. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) challenge the arrangement through

which provision is designed for “*most*” learners before something different or additional is offered to “*some*.” Instead, inclusive pedagogy seeks to “*extend what is ordinarily available to everybody*” (p. 814), anticipating difference without using it as the basis for separating or lowering expectations. Florian and Spratt (2013) develop this position by treating difficulty as a dilemma for teaching rather than a problem residing within the learner, and by placing responsibility upon educators to devise new ways of working with and through others. Although this scholarship was developed largely through school-based research and teacher education, its underlying concern extends directly to higher education: students enter university classrooms with unequal linguistic confidence, disciplinary preparation, cultural memory, disability-related access needs and personal proximity to the histories under discussion. Inclusion must therefore shape text selection, historical support, the pacing of inquiry, the organization of dialogue, the availability of different modes of response and the refusal to treat public disclosure as evidence of authentic engagement. It determines who can participate in its difficulty, what forms that participation may take and whether demanding intellectual work is made available without presuming that close reading must look the same for everyone.

What remains limited is conceptual guidance on how these insights may be brought together when migration literature is used to teach histories of forced movement in diverse university classrooms. The gap lies not in an absence of work on history, literature, empathy or inclusion, but in the limited pedagogical conversation among them. A framework is therefore needed that holds historical context, literary encounter, critical reflection and inclusive participation together, treating empathy neither as the natural gift of literature nor as a response that can be cultivated without attending to the different positions from which students enter the classroom.

Discussion

The framework begins from the distinction

between literary encounter and pedagogical outcome. Migration literature may bring public history into contact with personal experience, but what students make of that encounter depends upon pedagogical choices: the historical context provided, the perspectives placed alongside the text, the questions asked, the organization of disagreement and the opportunities for reflection. The proposed framework views empathy not as a fixed personal trait nor as the ethical benefit derived from engaging with literature. It perceives empathy as a form of engagement that is developed through pedagogy, requiring a historical context, critical reflection, and inclusive practice. These three qualities establish the foundational concepts of the framework. Historical contextualization prevents empathy from becoming an imaginative engagement detached from its political and social circumstances. Critical reflexivity focuses on the selectivity, uncertainty, and potential bias inherent in the reader's response. Inclusive enactment guarantees that the classroom environment does not favor solely those students who possess linguistic confidence, cultural familiarity with history, or ease in public emotional expression.

The requirement for empathy to remain historically situated is especially important because classroom discussions of suffering frequently shift too quickly to the language of identity. However, difficult histories cannot be approached responsibly by replacing the historical subject with a modern reader. Historical empathy provides a more disciplined approach because it combines affective engagement and contextual understanding. Endacott and Brooks (2013) describe it as “*the process of students cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions*” (p. 41). Their definition is significant to the current framework as it rejects the division of thought and feeling, ensuring that neither can substitute for the other. What is needed is a shift between the two: students approach closely enough to acknowledge fear, attachment, uncertainty, or

loss, yet they also stay mindful of the historical differences that hinder them from fully accessing another person's experience. In the realm of migration literature, this implies that a novel, short story, or testimony should not be expected to bear the full weight of historical explanation. The depiction of a rushed exit, a fractured family, or an unreachable home should be interpreted in conjunction with the political context that established the border, the social dynamics that influenced vulnerability, and the disparate conditions that affected individuals' ability to move, stay, return, or endure. Partition literature holds significance in this context as it illustrates how an event typically structured by dates, negotiations, and territorial divisions permeated personal lives. However, it should be viewed as one particular narrative among numerous others, rather than a clear and unambiguous account of history.

Historical grounding, nonetheless, does not eliminate the uncertainties associated with empathy, as students engage with narratives from varying perspectives rather than from an equal or neutral distance. The same literary figure may seem familiar to one reader, culturally distant to another, and uncomfortably close to a third. Narrative form distributes this closeness unevenly, granting some figures sustained interiority while leaving others peripheral or opaque. Keen (2006) similarly cautions that narrative techniques may invite emotional responsiveness without guaranteeing ethical transformation.

Empathy is often characterized as intrinsically generous, yet it is uneven and shaped by familiarity. Zhou (2022) shows that teachers and students may respond more readily to those perceived as similar, while Meyers et al. describe teacher empathy as existing along a continuum rather than as a quality one simply possesses (as cited in Zhou, 2022, p. 4). Critical reflexivity therefore begins not by asking only how students felt, but by examining why a particular narrative produced that response, which assumptions accompanied it and whether emotional proximity deepened understanding or substituted for it. The educator's task is not to classify these responses as successful or failed empathy, but to turn them into material for

further inquiry. Empathy retains pedagogical value when it prompts students to question and revise their readings; it loses that value when it merely confirms the reader's sense of being compassionate.

Critical reflexivity alters the way disagreement and emotional resistance are perceived. A challenging response cannot always be rectified by providing additional information, as students' interpretations may be linked to ingrained memories, national narratives, and deeply held emotional understandings of community. This does not imply that prejudice or historical misinformation should be regarded as a valid perspective among others. It indicates that correction by itself might not affect the attachment that supports the view. Zembylas's concept of strategic empathy is significant as it strikes a balance, neither glorifying emotional identification nor neglecting students whose reactions may challenge the educator. As he articulates, "*Strategic empathy signifies a willingness to teach with ambiguity, ambivalence, and paradox... a relational construct that is both emotional and strategic*" (2012, p. 122). Strategic empathy does not necessitate that the educator take an aggressive or historically untenable stance; rather, it demands a careful consideration to grasp the emotional weight of that stance and how it can be critically examined in relation to evidence and diverse experiences. This is especially significant when teaching the 1947 Partition, as students may receive distinctly varied narratives regarding innocence, betrayal, belonging, and loss.

The objective is not to reconcile those histories into a neutral midpoint nor to suggest that each claim possesses equal historical or ethical significance. It serves to ensure that the classroom remains operational when conflicts arise. A student's expressions of disagreement, denial, or defensiveness may indicate the ongoing relevance of the historical content being discussed, while another student's silence may suggest that the same conversation holds a distinct personal significance. The framework acknowledges the presence of discomfort while clearly distinguishing it from the process of transformation. Boler's critique of passive

empathy provides valuable insights in this context. The act of feeling for those who suffer may not alter the observer's own position, whereas a more rigorous engagement prompts an examination of how interpretative habits, emotional allegiances, and systems of privilege influence what the observer can or chooses to acknowledge (Boler, 1999). Literary narratives have the capacity to illuminate these tensions, as they often present experiences in a manner that diverges from the structured formats typically employed in the commemoration of national history. Their contradictions, silences, and divided perspectives generate a space for discomfort; however, it is essential for pedagogy to maintain that discomfort in relation to inquiry, rather than permitting it to devolve into guilt, defensiveness, or emotional spectacle.

Recognizing that students come to this inquiry from very diverse backgrounds informs the third quality of the framework, inclusive enactment. Diversity in university classrooms extends beyond visible identity or nationality to linguistic confidence, disciplinary preparation, disability, cultural memory and personal proximity to migration or conflict. Students' understanding and their ability to confidently and safely share that understanding are both influenced by these differences. Those who are fluent in the instructional language, comfortable with academic disagreement, or who don't care if their opinion is seen as representative of the whole community may continue to benefit from a whole-class discussion even though it appears to be open to everyone. Resisting the assumption of a neutral classroom is thus necessary. *"Students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development"* (Ambrose et al., 2010, as cited in Troka et al., 2021, pp. 3-4). Teaching decisions should instead anticipate the conflicts that diversity may cause. In this context, inclusive pedagogy is not a way to include certain students in a programme that is structured to accommodate a presumption of majority participation. Instead of focusing on separate provision, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) state that inclusion should *"extend what is ordinarily available to everybody"* (p. 814),

meaning that there should be a broader range of opportunities integrated into regular teaching. When applied to contentious historical periods, this means providing multiple entry points for interpretation and ways of articulating comprehension. The intellectual demand of the task can be met by combining various strategies such as private written reflection, paired conversation, collaborative annotation, visual or conceptual mapping, smaller-group dialogue, and carefully structured whole-class discussion. It is unacceptable to expect students to reveal personal information about themselves, their families, or their religious or national groups, or to use their experiences of being close to violent people as proof in class. Rather than making the conversation easier, inclusion changes who can have a say in how challenging it is and under what circumstances.

The framework's five interconnected movements - historical and positional grounding, situated literary encounter, multiperspectival reading, dialogic inquiry, and reflective reorientation carry these three attributes: -historical situation, critical reflexivity, and inclusive enactment. Because understanding does not happen in a straight line, they are movements rather than fixed stages. A student may only realize during reflection that an initial emotional reaction was dependent upon an assumption they had not previously noticed; a second narrative may change the significance of an earlier passage; or a misconception revealed during discussion may necessitate a return to historical context. However, the first movement starts before any empathic work is required of the literary narrative. In order for the literary text to enter an established field of study, students are exposed to a small but sufficiently plural set of historical materials, such as timelines, maps, political decisions, demographic data, photographs, testimonies, or brief excerpts from conflicting public accounts. The goal is to make sure that the personal experience portrayed in literature is not separated from the forces that produced it, rather than to finish the history before reading, which would be neither feasible nor desirable.

In addition to a solid historical foundation, students reflect on the origins of their current

knowledge. They might keep a personal record of the sources of their knowledge, whether it stems from formal education, family stories, films, national commemorations, social media, or previous academic pursuits. They may also note the terms that have shaped their understanding of migration: freedom, rupture, refuge, invasion, exile, opportunity, abandonment, or survival. Such an exercise does not demonstrate that every previous account holds the same level of reliability. It reveals that students engage with the text through stories that have already been shared with them. The educator can then regard prior knowledge as a valuable resource while also being receptive to its revision. In a classroom exploring Partition literature, the difference between independence as a national accomplishment and Partition as an experience of compelled displacement may become apparent even before a literary text is presented. The narrative then emerges not merely as an emotional correction to historical knowledge but as an alternative lens through which the uneven significance of the event can be explored.

The second movement, situated literary encounter, gives students sustained access to the narrative while resisting the urge to identify with it. The instruction to imagine that this happened to you may seem to encourage empathy, but it puts the reader at the center of another's history and ignores the social context. A closer look asks how the narrative explains displacement from a specific historical, cultural, and embodied perspective. Literature arranges access to experience, so close reading is crucial. Point of view, tense, silence, repetition, chronology gaps, voice changes, and withheld information affect reader proximity. Students may examine why one consciousness is revealed while another remains opaque, why violence is narrated directly in one moment but silenced in another, or how home changes once geographical return is impossible. Pritam (2009) Pinjar can be used to discuss the gendered experience of abduction, communal belonging, and social rejection, but the classroom does not treat Puro's experience as representative of all women during Partition as historical evidence that requires no further mediation.

Students can examine how public violence enters intimate life and how literary form makes some aspects of that experience visible while obscuring others in the text. Students can record initial responses before discussion to acknowledge anger, sadness, distance, confusion, or resistance without having to react. Students can distinguish between the narrative, what they inferred, and what they brought when these responses are placed alongside textual evidence. The goal is to prevent feeling from self-validating, not to suppress it for critical analysis.

The third movement expands the encounter through multiple perspectives. A compelling narrative can draw attention, but it can also become so emotionally persuasive that it replaces the entire history. Thus, the framework requires students to relate accounts rather than identify with a central character to conclude the inquiry. Reading a fictional passage alongside testimony, comparing narratives shaped by different religious, caste, regional, gendered, or generational positions, or examining what is missing from the text are examples. Not all perspectives are morally equivalent. The victim of violence, the perpetrator, the official who displaces, and the silent bystander are not interchangeable, and historical complexity should not be used to resolve power or responsibility issues. Yet ethical judgement is more rigorous when it follows an effort to understand choice circumstances, not before. Students can ask what fear, coercion, loyalty, opportunism, or social pressure influenced an action while assessing its consequences. The same movement highlights those who remain narratively marginal: those who could not move, those left behind, those whose displacement was not recognized, women whose experiences were absorbed into familial honour, communities under-represented in dominant national accounts, or figures whose language and class make them less legible to contemporary readers. Partition literature provides excellent illustrations because its narratives repeatedly challenge the idea of a single public memory. The framework does not need a complete literary archive. It takes enough difference to prevent one text from becoming the whole and enough historical care

to avoid flattening distinct experiences into a general story of suffering.

The fourth movement engages these readings in a dialogic inquiry, allowing interpretations to be examined alongside evidence and the perspectives of other readers. Discussion is important because empathy developed in isolation may go unchallenged; a student might believe that a character has been fully understood until a different interpretation uncovers a neglected silence, stereotype, or historical assumption. Dialogue becomes inclusive only when it is structured, rather than romanticized as an open exchange where everyone is equally free to speak. Students might begin by writing, then engage in conversation with pairs or small groups, and only after that participate in a broader discussion. This progression allows for the organization of thoughts and diminishes the likelihood that immediate whole-class discussions will be dominated by a few confident voices. Questions ought to seek the basis of interpretation instead of personal revelations: Which detail in the passage reinforces the interpretation? What historical details add complexity to the situation? Which voice remains absent from the discussion? What is still unclear? In what ways did a different interpretation change the meaning of the passage? Conflict is inevitable, as the existence of diverse memories and perspectives makes disagreement probable and often essential for learning. Inclusive teaching acknowledges that diversity can serve as a powerful driver for learning, provided that students receive appropriate support and the dynamics of the interaction are held to a standard of accountability (Troka et al., 2021). The educator does not maintain neutrality by permitting dehumanizing language or clearly false historical claims to spread without opposition. Nor does the educator determine every acceptable conclusion in advance. The role is to maintain the difference between challenging an interpretation and undermining the individual who presents it, while ensuring the conversation remains connected to history, text, and the implications of the assertions being made. Strategic empathy functions not as a form of

agreement, but as an endeavor to grasp the emotional and historical connections embedded in a response, allowing for questioning rather than simple condemnation or neglect.

The fifth movement, reflective reorientation, brings students back to the initial assumptions, reactions, and ambiguities they encountered. The absence of reflection prevents students from declaring that literature has enhanced their empathy. Such an assertion would be challenging to substantiate and could favor the outcomes of ethical enhancement over the efforts of analysis. Students instead examine how historical evidence, alternative interpretations or reconsideration of narrative perspective altered their initial response. This approach to reorientation perceives revision as a manifestation of learning instead of a sign of inconsistency. It additionally provides a more accountable foundation for evaluation. Students ought not to be evaluated based on their demonstration of grief, empathy, or affinity towards a historical topic. Evaluation can focus on their capacity to contextualize a literary encounter, utilize textual and historical evidence, acknowledge multiple viewpoints, scrutinize their own stance, and adjust an interpretation in light of new insights. A reflective essay, comparative portfolio, dialogic commentary, or annotated map of perspectives can elucidate these processes without feigning to quantify empathy as an emotion.

The educator's empathy is evident across all five movements; however, it necessitates a critical and inclusive framework for effective implementation. Teacher empathy is frequently linked to attributes such as warmth, attentiveness, and responsiveness, which can cultivate trust and encourage participation. However, an educator might be more inclined to engage with articulate students, those who express familiar cultural perspectives, or individuals exhibiting visible distress, while potentially misinterpreting silence as a sign of disengagement and hesitation as an indication of inadequate preparation. Zhou's (2022). assertion regarding the potential derailment of empathy due to similarity bias holds significant relevance for the dynamics between educators and their students, as well as for students' interactions

with literary figures. Teacher empathy gains pedagogical significance when it actively influences decision-making processes, rather than merely serving as a statement regarding the educator's character. It does not diminish expectations, eliminate challenging content, or ensure emotional reassurance. It establishes multiple meticulously crafted pathways that facilitate broader access to rigorous investigation.

Within this framework, Partition literature continues to serve as an illustrative medium rather than an organizing center. However, the framework does not rely on the claim that Partition literature has a unique ability to elicit empathy. The same principles can be used to teach other histories of forced movement, as long as the transfer does not reduce distinct political circumstances to interchangeable examples of displacement. Text selection therefore necessitates caution. The most graphic narrative may shock without sustaining thought, whereas a single emotionally compelling perspective may reproduce exclusions if not supported by adequate context or counter-position. Educators must consider what a text provides, what it excludes, how much historical background is required, and whether additional voices are required. Content notices may be appropriate in texts that contain sexual violence, abduction, death, or communal brutality, but they should provide informed access rather than stripping the curriculum of difficult material. The framework is still conceptual and has not yet been tested across institutions, disciplines, or student groups. Its effectiveness cannot be inferred from visible emotional responses, and literary narratives are still mediated constructs rather than direct access to lived experience. Translation, canon formation, and the availability of specific accounts all influence which experiences enter the classroom. These limitations do not diminish the framework's importance; rather, they specify the conditions under which its claims should be tested in future classroom-based research.

Conclusion

The difficulty of teaching histories of forced

migration does not arise only from the violence they contain. It also emerges from the unsettled relationship they create between historical knowledge, inherited memory and the positions from which students enter the classroom. Migration literature makes that relationship visible by tracing how political rupture is lived through homes, families, languages and memories. Literary proximity alone cannot guarantee historically responsible understanding. The argument developed in this paper therefore shifts attention from what literature is assumed to produce towards what teaching enables students to do with it. Empathy is not treated as the inevitable outcome of reading, but as a form of engagement that must be historically situated, critically reflexive and inclusively enacted.

The framework gives pedagogical shape to this claim through five connected movements: historical and positional grounding, situated literary encounter, multiperspectival reading, dialogic inquiry and reflective reorientation. Together, these movements prevent emotional response from becoming detached from history, invite students to approach another experience without claiming possession of it, and make revision central to learning. They also refuse to measure empathy through the performance of an approved emotion. A student's learning may be visible instead in the ability to recognize the limits of an initial interpretation, read literary experience alongside historical evidence, hold more than one perspective in view and remain open to uncertainty. The framework does not promise that every encounter with migration literature will produce empathy. It establishes the conditions under which empathic engagement may become more historically responsible, intellectually demanding and ethically alert.

Partition literature serves as an illustrative medium for this framework because it combines political violence, forced movement, fractured belonging, and inherited memory into a single narrative field. Its role, however, is not to serve as the model's sole subject or as a uniquely privileged path to empathy. The same principles

can be applied to other histories of displacement, as long as different political contexts are not reduced to interchangeable examples of suffering. As a conceptual model, the framework now requires empirical classroom-based testing across various institutional, disciplinary, and cultural contexts. Such research should not only investigate whether students report feeling more empathetic, but also how they use evidence, revise interpretations, engage in difficult dialogue, and encounter perspectives that resist easy identification. Inclusive pedagogy is what gives the framework its final coherency. It is neither a polite atmosphere surrounding difficult material nor an accommodation made after some students have already been excluded from discussion. It shapes the encounter from the start, determining which histories and perspectives become available, what forms of participation are acknowledged, whether silence is interpreted as failure, and whether students are expected to translate personal or inherited pain into public testimony. Ambrose et al. observe:

“Even though some of us might wish to conceptualize our classrooms as culturally neutral or might choose to ignore the cultural dimensions, students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development... Therefore, it is important that the pedagogical strategies we employ in the classroom reflect an understanding of social identity development so that we can anticipate the tensions that might occur in the classroom and be proactive about them.”

- (Ambrose et al., 2010, as cited in Troka et al., 2021, p. 3)

Inclusive pedagogy gives the framework its final coherence by shifting attention from presumed learner limitations to the design of teaching itself. Florian and Black-Hawkins’s (2011) call to “*extend what is ordinarily available to everybody*” (p. 814) is therefore central here. Inclusion does not diminish the complexity of difficult histories; it ensures that rigorous historical, ethical and interpretive engagement is not reserved for students who are most confident, culturally familiar or comfortable with public emotional expression.

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